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World Chronicle

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BBC

Julia Preston
The Washington Post

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UNA/USA

Edward LUCK, President Emeritus and Senior Policy Advisor to the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA/USA), elaborates on the activities of this establishment in support of the world organization, which it does not hesitate to criticize in a constructive fashion. The United States and the United Nations need each other. The UNA/USA is in favour of a slightly larger Security Council.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

As never before since its establishment in 1945, the United Nations is at the centre of international affairs. In a world of constant change, the global organization responds to new challenges and takes on new tasks. But the United Nations doesn't exist in a vacuum. If the Organization is to have the capacity to achieve its goals, it needs the support of the peoples of the world.

Our guest today heads a major public establishment dedicated to the cause of the global organization. He is Edward Luck, President Emeritus and Senior Policy Advisor for the United Nations Association of the United States of America, better known as UNA/USA. Joining me to talk with Mr. Luck are Jon Leyne of the BBC and Julia Preston of *The Washington Post*. Mr. Luck, welcome to World Chronicle.

LUCK: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: I notice in the literature about UNA/USA that you grew out of an organization that was founded as long ago as 1943, under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt -- impressive stuff. But also what seemed to me not quite so impressive is the fact that you have only 23,000 members. When you consider the population of the United States, that's a rather dismal percentage. Why is that?

LUCK: Well, I think first of all it's a question partly of the quality and the activity of the membership. I'd rather have 15,000 really active and effective people than 100,000 who are just names on a list. But besides that, I think you have to look at most foreign affairs organizations tend to be quite small, and most of them, in fact, don't have active memberships or chapters around the country. We have those in 178 cities. So we're spread widely, but you're right, we are spread rather thin. There's not a great wellspring of internationalism that has carried an organization like ours through the years; in fact, it's been fairly tough at times. We'd like to have more members, but that's partly a matter of money and direct mail and this sort of thing, but at least it's a start.

LITTLEJOHNS: UNA/USA conducts polls from time to time on the attitudes of the American people toward the United Nations. What has the latest poll shown? Is the Organization in good odour with the American public?

LUCK: Well, actually, surprisingly so, given all the controversy these days. I haven't seen a time we've had as consistently such high support by the US people. It's not just polls that we have taken, but by many organizations. The general support is

very high; the support for peacekeeping -- at least in the abstract -- is very high, and people think that we have a very troubled world. There was a *New York Times* poll that showed by a three-to-one margin that people said the world is more dangerous since the end of the cold war, not less so. So they see the need for the UN, they see the UN on the front lines trying to make a difference. That doesn't mean they recognize it as a perfect organization, it doesn't mean they don't have a lot of criticisms, but I think they're here to stay, they're not running away from it.

PRESTON: Ed, what about Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali? Has he helped to enhance the United Nations in the esteem of the American public or not?

LUCK: Well, in an odd way he's become a butt of certain jokes because of his names and the evening talk shows and this and that, so perhaps he's brought a new twist to the UN's representation in the US. But certainly he's very articulate, he's outspoken -- in cases like Rwanda, for example, he was reminding American citizens and people in other countries to get out front, to try to do something before things really got out of control. So he is a controversial figure, particularly in political circles, but I think people do recognize that he is a spokesperson, he is trying to reach out, and perhaps sometimes he antagonizes governments at the same time that he's trying to reach their people.

LEYNE: I'm very interested in these opinion polls, and I know you've shown them before showing strong American support for the UN, and yet every time the Congress criticizes the UN, the current Administration seems to run scared. How can your organization, how can people in general mobilize American public opinion -- it seems to be so strongly in favour of the UN -- mobilize it to do something practical?

LUCK: I think that's a good question. We have a couple of problems. One is how do you make the connection between the people and their views on the one hand and actions by Congress on the other. That's a linkage which I don't think has been made well enough by our organization or by others. So people in Congress think that a vote against the UN is a cost-free vote. I think we have a lot of broad support for the UN, but I think when you put it on people's agendas it's probably number 14, not number 1, and it's not a single-issue organization. The American people don't like Congress, they don't like the presidency, and they don't like the UN. They don't like government very much, and they're not particularly respectful of institutions. So the UN as an institution, I think, is hard to love in terms of the people. They love the ideal, they love the idea of international cooperation, but when it comes to questions of management, when it comes to questions of finance, that's a little tougher to do. And right now we have a real problem in Congress, as you know. It's no longer bipartisan

support for the UN, like it had been; unfortunately, the not-so-loyal minority on this issue in Congress has decided to embarrass the president very often and not support funding bills. So it's very hard sometimes even to get more than a few Republican votes for very fundamental things, like our responsibilities in peacekeeping. So I think that's a particular problem of this body politic at this point in time; I don't think it's a long-term problem.

PRESTON: Because, I mean, this is more like a worldwide issue really. People in general -- in general people are approving of the UN, but then their politicians kick it around.

LUCK: Well, you know, I'm someone who believes that even an organization like ours should be a constructive critic of the UN. If you like an organization, if you care about what it does, you have to want it to use its money effectively, you want to criticize it when it doesn't do well and support it when it does. So I don't think it's a question that we have a love-hate relationship with the UN, but even those who want to support it do so, I think, through constructive criticism and not just through blind support.

PRESTON: Let me ask you about another personality. How about US Ambassador Madeleine Albright? Is she helpful to your cause, do you think? Has she been helpful to you in particular in your work? And, in general, how do you think the American public perceives her?

LUCK: I think Madeleine is, again, one of the most articulate spokespeople that the Adminstration has on foreign policy. That has not been the great strength of this Administration, but she has been quite outspoken and quite consistent, I think. There have been times, perhaps, perhaps after Mogadishu last year and the incident October 3rd where the US Administration in general was in retreat and Congress was almost acting and talking in a very neo-isolationist way, at that point in time perhaps she retreated as many of the others did, but they're coming back. And I think by and large she's been quite supportive and quite helpful.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mentioned a love-hate relationship between UNA/USA and the United Nations. What things have you particularly hated that the UN has done in recent years?

LUCK: Well, I'm not quite sure that we're love-hate, but we are very much critics of the UN. Among other things, I think we've been pushing very hard for management reform within the Organization, not just in terms of administration and finance, but also in terms of the decision-making process by the Member States' governments. They're really like a board of directors of the UN. You have 184

countries in the General Assembly, 54 in the Economic and Social Council. That's too many to make choices, to really set priorities, and so we see a lot of drift, a lot of indecision, and a UN that's for all things and against nothing and somehow has a hard time picking and choosing. The only time you really see that -- hard choices being made on a consistent basis -- is in the Security Council, because it's relatively small and because the nation-states there think they have real interests to boost.

LITTLEJOHNS: But now a lot of members want to increase the membership of the Security Council, quite substantially in some cases, although others say it should be kept around the low 20s from the present 15. Does UNA/USA have a position on that?

LUCK: Well, maybe we're schizophrenic. We have a couple of positions on that that we put forward. We are in favour of expanding the Council, of bringing Japan and Germany aboard, probably without veto power --

LITTLEJOHNS: Without the veto.

LUCK: Without the veto. I think there are enough vetos; I think it's a relic of the past. And you don't make decision-making any easier by having six or seven or eight vetos. We also would favour bringing on more developing countrie, and there we have different formulas. My favourite is to bring on one more each from Africa, Asia and Latin America, but let those regions decide who shall represent them on a rotating basis, like we have now, and maybe have an additional country just chosen at large. So you go up to about 21. I think if you get 22, 23, that's fine, but you if get 25 or more, I think you have a different kind of a Council. And they talk about democratizing the Council, but the biggest problem, I think, is the gap very often between words and deeds within the Council, and I don't think that's improved by adding more and more countries to it.

LEYNE: I wanted to ask you about -- I see you're really at the intersection between the United States and the UN, this fascinating relationship. And everybody else around the world, particularly when I go back to Europe, they say, "Isn't the place just a puppet of the United States? Isn't it just run by Washington?" And of course here in the United States we hear exactly the opposite arguments, people saying, "Oh, we shouldn't let the UN run our foreign policy, we shouldn't let Boutros Boutros-Ghali run our foreign policy." It's a strange contradiction, and I wonder who thinks who's right and why it happens like this.

LUCK: Well, I think it's inevitable, Jon, that there will be a certain amount of frustration. If you designed a perfect world to have a multilateral organization like the UN, there would be a fair distribution of power. You'd have a lot of middle powers, in essence. You don't have that. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the US is the only country that can even have a pretence of being a superpower any more. And in that

sense it's very awkward. I sometimes say it's like the 800-pound gorilla in the back of the canoe. When it paddles, it can make that UN canoe go very quickly, but also if it leans a little bit one way or the other it can capsize it very quickly just as well. So it's sort of a love-hate relationship. You can't have a strong UN without active US involvement. And, on the other hand, I think Americans are beginning to recognize that we need the UN too, that we have global interests, we need burden sharing, we can't do it all on our own. We need, really, the authority, the legitimacy that the UN gives for many of the operations. If you even look at Haiti, it should have been, you would think, a minor thing for the days of imperialism for the US just to go in and get its job done, but the Administration was very careful about going step by step and getting Security Council authorization. So I think it's difficult. The UN is bound to be frustrated by American power, and the US is bound to be a little bit frustrated that the UN at times constrains our power. And so I think it's going to be a difficult relationship, but a necessary one.

LEYNE: Well, it's been a particularly stormy relationship the last couple of years, --

LUCK: Yeah.

LEYNE: -- but do you think that the two organizations are slowing coming together to cooperate more? They seem to sort of split apart and then come together and split apart so often. Is it sort of stabilizing now?

LUCK: Well, they never quite get to a divorce, but the marriage is always a little bit shaky. I think it's maybe a little more stable now than it was, let's say, a year ago or six months ago, partly because the Administration has begun to find its own way. But part of the problem -- and I can appreciate the frustration for people in other countries -- is that Americans have to decide and understand what their interests are in the world, why we participate in the UN, what we're seeking in the world. If we don't have a coherent foreign policy, it's very hard then for others to know how to react and what to expect from us within the UN, and that, I think, is a very big frustration. But I think we're beginning to find our way. But everyone, after all, is struggling. It's not just the US that has had leadership problems, it's been true in every country I can think of. In the post-cold war era everything is uncertainty, everything is transition. So we live, we experiment and we get on with things.

LEYNE: What you seem to be implying is that the UN, to some extent, is having to carry the can for Washington's foreign policy problems.

LUCK: Well, there have been problems. I think particularly Somalia was a good case in point, but to a certain extent in Bosnia and elsewhere. It's very tempting to

blame the UN for our own failures. And I think there are some cases, and I think Somalia was one of them, where both the Secretary-General was wrong and the US was wrong. And when they're both wrong in the same direction at the same time, there's no one to say no and the train just goes off the tracks. That, I think, is a real problem. I sometimes hear from some of the developing countries that the role of the UN is to constrain American power; that somehow you have all these little countries, the Lilliputians, that are somehow going to tie down this big Gulliver of the United States. And that, of course, is not the way to encourage US participation. And we have to believe that the UN helps to fulfil our own ideals, our own aspirations and our own purposes, not very narrowly-drawn national interests, but the broad things for which the United States stands, certainly reflected in the UN Charter. And I think very much Americans like to think of the UN as their organization; that of course is part of the problem, it's not just our organization, it's everybody's organization.

PRESTON: Ed, I wanted to ask you about some of the financial issues. You know, the Secretary-General has been describing what he calls the catastrophic effect on UN finances of the failure of the United States, principally, but other countries as well, to pay their arrears. And I'm wondering if you agree with that assessment, that this is catastrophic, and whether you think that American voters and taxpayers are ready to pay the kind of bills that could be coming out of the United Nations, $1 billion, $2 billion for peacekeeping, this kind of --

LUCK: Sounds like real money.

PRESTON: It sounds like real money.

LUCK: Yeah, I think your point is a good one. I've been around the UN for about 20 years, so maybe I'm a little bit jaundiced. I don't remember a time when all the countries paid their dues up front and in full. The UN has always been in financial trouble. And I think the Member States, in a way, like to keep it in financial trouble. It's a shorter leash; it can't go very far because it doesn't have the finances. It can't print money, it can't borrow money, so it really is up to the Member States to give their money, and the US in particular uses its contributions for leverage. If you do what we want, we'll give you a little more; we'll withhold some if you don't do what we want. And Congress in particular has been very bad at that, ignoring our legal obligations to pay our dues to the UN. So it is a tough situation. Whether it's about to go over the cliff financially, I don't know. The Administration, I think, made some progress this summer, I gather, $1.2 billion -- and that is real money -- from Congress to pay much of our arrearages for peacekeeping. We still owe money to the regular budget, to many of the specialized agencies and to peacekeeping, because as new operations come up we

don't have the money. It's not really that the UN is so expensive; I mean, if you look at it as a portion of a $1.52 trillion national budget, the $1 billion that we pay to the UN for peacekeeping, the $300 million we pay for the regular budget really is not what one would call big money in Washington.

But with peacekeeping there are two problems. One, it's growing rapidly. It's cheaper to have the UN do it than have to do it on our own, but the actual numbers are growing quickly. The other thing is that they grow in an unpredictable way. They don't follow nice, neat budgetary cycles. Congress says, the Administration says, we plan X amount of money for the coming year. Well, there are international crises that break out. And, you know, we want to send the UN here, we want to send the UN there, and then we think about the fact the money isn't in the budget. And that's a big, big problem.

And also with peacekeeping there's been this difficulty that now much of it is enforcement. It's not typical peacekeeping. How much should come from the defence budget? How much should come from the State Department? Which committees in Congress should control it? So it's a little bit of an orphan in terms of budgeting in Washington, and that's a difficult thing.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Edward Luck, President Emeritus and Senior Policy Advisor for the United Nations Association of the United States of America.

Speaking of peacekeeping, Mr. Luck, there's a headline here from *The New York Times* in May 1994: "New US Peacekeeping Policy De-emphasizes Role of the UN." It relates to a presidential policy directive which was some time in the making. Does UNA/USA have a position on that? Do you think that it's good to de-emphasize UN peacekeeping?

LUCK: Well, let me give you my personal position -- you know, UNA is a diverse organization, I'm not sure that everyone believes the same thing. I think there was some backtracking that led up to that document. That's why the gestation period was so difficult and so long, because of some pretty deep difficulties and disagreements within the bureaucracy in Washington, and particularly with Congress. But I do think now they see that as a foundation for rebuilding the relationship. The US, after all, is the largest supporter of UN peacekeeping. They are pushing to have that go down from 30 per cent to 25 per cent of the cost that we share, but we do carry a large burden. We have now put a few American forces at least under UN command, and we are beginning, I think, to be more supportive now of the UN getting involved in various places. However, that doesn't mean that we have a wholesale support and embrace of UN

peacekeeping wherever and whenever. And I think we have a time now that a lot of these exercises, a lot of these missions that the UN is undertaking at the behest of the Member States, are experiments. And tney're in many of the toughest places. Traditional peacekeeping was sort of after the fact, when everyone wanted to cooperate, and the UN went in and helped them to do so. Now, in places like Bosnia, Somalia, and even in Haiti, there are parties that don't want this to work. So they're going into some very tough situations, things that require military force and compellents [sic], and not just passive peacekeeping. So it's a very difficult thing, and when you see the possibility of young men and women at risk, putting their lives on the line.... There have been now more than 1000 casualties, for example, in the UN operation in the former Yugoslavia alone; 1000 is a lot. So there are real risks there, and then administrations pull back.

And as you know, many people in the US now, particularly in Congress, are very reluctant to see any lives lost, and therefore any risks taken. And they think that somehow in this very chaotic, very dangerous world you can have a low risk, low cost, minimalist foreign policy -- no casualties, no problems, no failures; and it doesn't work that way. And I think what we have to recognize is that you've got to stay with it in good times and bad, and that, I think, the Administration is beginning to recognize. I hope over time the Congress will. But I think that particular document was a little more cautious than I'd like to see it, but it wasn't a terrible piece.

LEYNE: Isn't that directive, though, also rather a symptom of the rather doctrinaire, or attempts to be doctrinaire, in foreign policy? I'm thinking particularly, for instance, of the American approach in Rwanda, where after the crisis broke out -- the president was probably assassinated -- the US then wanted all the UN Peacekeepers to pull out because it didn't fit in with these very strict criteria for peacekeeping. And then, of course, all hell broke out, and then they decided to send a whole lot of people in there. Isn't that a problem, this very doctrinaire approach?

LUCK: Well, I think it is doctrinaire in the sense that they have a lot of questions you have to answer, a lot of hurdles you have to cross. And the question is, are these questions that you're responding to to find a rationale for involvement, or finding an excuse not to go in and not get involved? So I think that is something of a problem. And one of the particular difficulties is that the Secretary-General, I think quite properly, has wanted the UN to get involved in preventive efforts, to get in quickly before things escalate out of control, when costs are less and lives have not been lost to such an extent. That goes against the grain of this new directive that says you ask 40,000 questions before you think about getting involved. So I think we have to rethink some of that. And you're right, Rwanda, I think, was an embarrassment. And some people in

the Administration said, "Oh, isn't this great? This is an example of the new policy and our new caution." Well, it was a good example of that, but it also was a good example of genocide, and hundreds of thousands of lives were lost in the meantime.

And I think it goes back to this problem I mentioned earlier of not knowing what we want and why in the world. Because our interests used to be dictated by the Soviet Union, by the cold war. We have a different kind of world now. I think we have a strong humanitarian interest to become involved in places like Rwanda, and it's a lot cheaper to do it early than it is later. The cost of the reconstruction and handling the refugees is going to be far higher than the cost would have been for going in earlier. But somehow everyone wants to have certain solutions: you know when you're going to go in, you know when you're going to get out, you know there are not going to be any lives lost, and everything's going to be hunky-dory. And it doesn't work that way. And that, I think, is the most difficult problem. We have to face up. If we don't like the scenes we see on TV of the devastation, if we don't like enormous human rights violations and genocide, then we have to pay some price for doing something about it. That's a tough one.

PRESTON: The Secretary-General has announced that he is going to stand for a second term as secretary-general. I'm wondering if you think that that was a prudent choice on his part, and whether you think that a second term with Boutros-Ghali would be positive for American public opinion and its view of the United Nations.

LUCK: Was this one of the easier questions? No, certainly it is an interesting tactic on his part. I think he was in essence pre-empting other possible candidates by letting people know that while he ran on a ticket saying that he did not want a second term, once he got into the job he realized there are some changes that made it interesting or intriguing to stay on a little bit longer.

PRESTON: As politicians often do.

LUCK: It happens all the time, yeah. And I think we just have to see. I think many of the Member States are getting reconciled to the Secretary-General. I think they found him to be sometimes a little abrasive, a little outspoken early on, but perhaps there is a question of what is the alternative, who else is there in the wings. So I wouldn't bet against his gaining a second term. But as you know, there's a very murky process for choosing a secretary-general, and you never know who might cast a veto in the night, you never know what other candidates might appear. There is no proper campaigning, there is no proper selection, there is really no rigorous way of going about this. And we're lucky when we get a decent secretary-general, given the process.

LEYNE: Some people think that secretaries-general should never have second terms as a matter of principle, because then they just spend the whole first term campaigning for re-election.

LUCK: Yeah, actually we recommended in a report some years ago that there be a single seven-year term, that perhaps five years wasn't quite enough. But to meet the problem that you're pointing out, for example, if Member States come in and they want to put in someone's nephew or cousin or favourite politco into some position in the UN, it's difficult for the secretary-general to say no if he has to go back to those same Member States for re-election. The same thing with funding and other issues. So if you had a single term, that would give the secretary-general more independence. So if you like the secretary-general and you like what he's doing -- or she, someday -- then more independence is a good thing. Right now the Member States like having the control.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Luck, you were recently in Japan and China. Do you work closely, does UNA/USA work closely with the national associations in other countries?

LUCK: Well, we have UN Associations in about 84 different countries. And some of them we have close relationships with, some are more distant. Actually the groups we work most closely with in China and Japan are not UNAs, because they're not primarily policy organizations in those countries. We have very cooperative relationships, but when you want to get into a policy dialogue and research, it may be a different kind of institution. For example, in the Soviet Union, and now Russia, there's been a UNA we've worked with since 1967 -- so a very long time, pre-detente, through the good years, through the bad years. And that's been very useful.

LITTLEJOHNS: The Japanese seemed to have some problems with the UN for a while. Have you -- did you detect a change of heart on their part?

LUCK: Well, certainly the Japanese are very interested in having a permanent seat in the Security Council. They want people to recognize that they have become far and away the second largest contributor after the US in financial terms. Some of their individuals now have prominent roles within the UN system. They're helping out in peacekeeping in a way they never did before. Not only did they send some forces to Cambodia, but they sent some to Mozambique, and most recently to help with the refugees in Rwanda. So for the Japanese, that's a major step forward. I mean, we wonder what US interests are in the world; it's not at all clear what Japanese interests are in Africa, and I think it's a very good thing that they are beginning to get involved in those kinds of operations. But indeed there is some difficulty there. There is some concern that they're not appreciated sufficiently by the international community, and they have continuing debates internally about how involved they should be in terms of

peacekeeping and their own military involvement in the UN. But I think it's moving, and I think it's moving in a positive direction.

LEYNE: How do you see the role of your organization, or think-tanks in general? I'm interested because the UN doesn't seem to have time or the manpower to do the sort of work you're doing. Are you almost a sort of policy-planning arm of the UN sometimes?

LUCK: Well, we like to think of ourselves as much more independent than that, and I'm sure the UN does not want to take any credit for what we say and what we do. We are very independent. We don't get funding either from the UN or from the US Government, so we really are very much independent voices. But I think it is a problem in the UN: there is no policy-planning staff, there is no contingency planning. If you look at the structure, it's amazing that the UN does as well as it does, because it is asked to get involved in a lot of new issues, a lot of new challenges, and yet there is really no place for long-term planning in the UN. Our work is very much policy-oriented. We try to be a catalyst, we try to come up with ideas, we try to push people, we try to nudge people, and we have no real power, but sometimes we can have a little bit of influence just because sometimes ideas do make a difference. If you get them to the right people at the right time, it really can make a difference.

LEYNE: Are you in danger of being over-idealistic?

LUCK: Well, that's a matter of perception, that's a subjective judgement. I don't think we're particularly sentimental or idealistic about the UN. I think some of our members, some of our founding ideals as an association were, but I think when you look at a lot of what we say and what we do, it's pretty hard-nosed. And we try very hard in this country to be bipartisan, to involve Republicans, Democrats, conservatives, liberals. This should be a broad national interest, it should not be captured by any particular group. And that forces you to be rather realistic.

LITTLEJOHNS: Are you actually successful in that endeavour? I mean, aren't the majority of your people, quote, "liberals", unquote, rather than "conservatives", quote-unquote?

LUCK: I think it depends where you look. Traditionally, as a chapter network with these 178 cities, most grassroots people tend to be liberal, tend to be Democrats, but not as much as it had been, let's say, 10 or 20 years ago. And our national leadership, I think, is very evenly divided. We really are quite bipartisan. And you have to be. I mean, you don't know whether you're going to have a Carter or a Reagan or a Clinton. Who knows who you're going to have to deal with? And you have to be able to work all sides. And there was a poll that we did two years ago, which I think was

something of an aberration, but it showed that conservatives and Republicans and men were all more supportive of the UN than were women, liberals, or Democrats.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Luck, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of World Chronicle.

LUCK: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Our guest has been Edward Luck, President Emeritus and Senior Policy Advisor for the United Nations Association of the United States of America. He was interviewed by Jon Leyne of the BBC and Julia Preston of the *Washington Post*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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